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ABSTRACT

The research reported in this paper is a follow-up study of a cohort (N=115) of African American males who attended a predominantly African American suburban school, Metropolitan High School (as it is called here) between 1986 and 1989. Cohort members have reached an average age of 21 years. Their former school district is located in a predominantly African American, near-central-city suburb. The mission of the high school is: "To ensure quality education for all students through effective teaching in a caring environment." This article examines the school-to-work and school-to-college transitions of the African American suburban cohort by linking its members' perceived high school experiences with their postsecondary activities. In the experimental format used here, the liberal use is made of quotations from the interviews to provide ample samples of the voices rarely heard in scholarly literature, those of African American males. The major foci are: (1) teachers and the academic challenge; (2) mathematics and the sciences; (3) career planning; (4) postsecondary educational pursuits; and (5) the realities of being African American, male, working-class, and unskilled. The similarities between the outcomes described by this group of African American males who attended a suburban school and their counterparts who attend troubled urban inner-city schools across the nation are noted. Five tables illustrate the discussion. (Contains 16 references.) (Author/SLD)

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ED 362 601

IF ONLY WE KNEW THEN WHAT WE KNOW NOW:

THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK AND SCHOOL-TO-COLLEGE TRANSITIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN SUBURBIA[1]

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ABSTRACT

The research reported on here is a follow-up study of a cohort (N=115) of African American males who attended a predominantly African American suburban school, Metropolitan High School (as it is called here) between 1986 and 1989. The members of the cohort have reached an average age of 21 years. The Metropolitan Public Schools, their former school district, is located in a predominantly African American, near-central-city suburb. The mission of the high school is, "To ensure quality education for all students through effective teaching in a caring environment."

The purpose of this article is to examine to school-to-work and the school-to-college transitions of the African American suburban cohort by linking its members perceived high school experiences with their post secondary school activities. In this experimental AERA format, the author quoted liberally from the interviews to provide ample samples of the voices rarely heard in scholarly literature, the African American males'. The major foci are: 1. Teachers and the academic challenge; 2. Mathematics and the sciences; 3. Career planning; 4. Post-secondary educational pursuits; and 5. The realities of being African American, male, working-class, and unskilled. The author denotes to the similarities between the outcomes described by this group of African American males who attended a suburban school and their counterparts who attend troubled urban inner-city schools across the nation.

The research reported on here is a follow-up study of a cohort (N=115) of African American males who attended a predominantly African American suburban school, Metropolitan High School (as I will call it) between 1986 and 1989. The members of the cohort have now reached an average age of 21 years. The Metropolitan Public Schools, their former school district, is located in a predominantly African American, near-central-city suburb. The mission of the school is, "To ensure quality education for all students through effective teaching in a caring environment." The purpose of this article is to examine to school-to-work transition of a cohort by linking their perceived high school experiences with their post secondary school activities. I have quoted liberally from my interviews to provide ample samples of the voices rarely heard in scholarly literature, the African American males'.

Methods

It is three years since the graduates completed their schooling at MHS in the class of 1989. Some of the non-graduates left school as long as five years ago. I returned to Metropolitan City during the summer, 1992 to conduct semi-structured interviews with 30 former students. I also used a telephone protocol to interview five males of the cohort who had relocated to other sections of country and were accessible only by telephone. Detailed notes from my interviews with five young men whom I visited in three State prison facilities were also included. (The five men are imprisoned for drug-related crimes.) The 39 contacts accounted for 34% of the original cohort of 115.

The interviews queried the African American males about their secondary school experiences including their perceived relevancy of the curriculum at MHS in preparing them for higher education and/or the work world. I was most interested in knowing their detailed reflections, as young males in a near-

central-city school district.

The African American Suburb

Metropolitan City is approximately three square miles, predominantly African American and situated on the first geographical ring of a large industrial city. The core City, not unlike other older and mainly African American cities across the country, is encircled by scores of incorporated municipalities as Massey and Denton (1988) have demonstrated.

Social scientists have given considerable attention to the escalated migration of middle-income African Americans out of the inner-cities during the 1970s and 1980s to near-central-city suburbs, seeking escape from the high crime rates, inferior public schools and services (Rose, 1976; Lake, 1981; Culver, 1982; Farley, 1983; Stahura, 1985 and 1987; Winsberg, 1983; Grier & Grier 1983; Kain 1985). Schneider and Logan (1985) have shown that near-central city, predominantly African American suburbs tend to replicate the adverse conditions of the inner-cities. This was clearly the case of Metropolitan City.

The Metropolitan High School (MHS) was built with all the amenities of an upper socio-economic community of the late 1950s to serve a "known" White student population. The administrators who designed and served at the school actually designed a school for their own children, complete with a radio station, planetarium, television station, theater, and deep diving and Olympic-sized swimming pools. The school was reputed to be one of the best secondary schools in the state in 1970. Table 1 depicts the socio-economic status, attitudes and aspirations, and academic achievement of the students in the District in 1970 when the school was mainly White and middle-income compared with the school districts in the Region and nearby urban fringe

districts.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

There were slightly more than 100 African American students attending MHS in 1970, less than 9 % of the total student body. African Americans began moving directly into Metropolitan City during the mid-1970s. MHS lost an average of 90 White students each year between 1970 and 1990, while it gained approximately the same number of African American students each year. Within a relatively short period of time, the school changed drastically in the domains of socio-economic make-up student achievement, attitudes and perceptions. The most obvious change, however, the racial make-up of the school, was apparent to teachers, parents, and students alike.

As African Americans moved directly into the Metropolitan Public School District resulting in larger overall percentages of African American students, Middle-income, Whites in the school district fled to the exurbs. Massey and Denton (1988) observed this "White exurban flight," phenomenon in similarly situated suburbs and concluded that, "once a suburb acquires a visible African American presence, it [the suburb] tends to attract more African American than Whites, which leads to neighborhood succession and the emergence of an African American enclave" (p. 594). White reaction to potential African American neighbors differs by community size and social class, with small homogeneous suburbs and ethnic blue-collar areas being more likely to resist integration through collective action according to Logan and Sterns (1986). Consequently, the migration of African Americans to the urban fringes of American cities most often fails to bring about neighborhood, social and economic equality

with Whites. Logan and Stern (1981) have also found that those suburbs that attract African American residents tend to be older areas and generally have relatively low socio-economic status.

According to Galster (1991), the population of African Americans in the suburbs increased twice as fast during the 1970s as during the 1960s. The growth was significantly greater in the suburbs than in the inner-cities. The suburbs which tend to be predominantly African American are characteristically found adjacent to or near to central cities (Logan and Schneider, 1984). Although the more affluent African Americans have increasingly chosen to relocate to the suburbs during the 1970s, the characteristics of African American suburbs have not changed radically since the 1940s. African Americans remain polarized in a relatively small number of suburbs, like Metropolitan City, whose make-up purport limited opportunities for social and economic improvement (Rosenbaum, Popkin, Kaufman & Rusin, 1991).

Few studies have qualitatively linked the school-to-work transition of African American suburbanites by analyzing the insiders' perspectives. The opinions of the students at Metropolitan Public School, a prototype case, are therefore instructive for educationalists and social scientists who grabble for explanations of the declining and underachievment of African American students, particularly males, in similar communities which by their suburban status ostensibly implies greater financial resources, conducive learning environments, high expectations for academic success, relevant curricula, rigorous and innovative teaching, and solid administrative support.

The Original Research

A cohort (N=115) of working-class African American males were enrolled in the tenth grade at MHS in the fall of 1986. I conducted a qualitative study of the members of this cohort beginning in their sophomore year through their expected graduation date in June, 1989 (Polite, 1992). The primary research focus was to assess the effectiveness of MHS in realizing its mission of, "ensuring a quality education for all students through effective teaching in a caring environment". A secondary goal of my original and present research was to give African American male respondents a "voice," meaning their perspectives are central to my work. My position as assistant principal allowed me access to records and the respondents in my unique role as a true participant observer. The outcomes were shared with key student informants, parents, teachers, administrators and the superintendent of schools as a crucial means of validating my findings.

The African American males' responses to schooling were explored. The major finding was that one way of analyzing the African American male respond was to categorized their behaviors as active or passive conforming or covert and overt resistance to schooling.

Table 2 provides a description of the academic outcomes of the class of 115 African American males.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Only half the cohort completed their high school education. Only 4 out of these graduated with a grade point average (GPA) above 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale), but 40 out of the 60 graduates achieved GPA's below 2.0. Among the 60

graduates, a mere 17 took the college entrance examination and only 4 scored high enough to be accepted at a 4-year higher education institution. Twenty-eight of the 115 original subjects were dropped, administratively, for non-attendance. Out of 115, 8 students were expelled for violent and aggressive behaviors, 23 were incarcerated between September, 1986 and June, 1989 and 3 were killed directly due to their involvement in the drug culture. The impact of an ascending negative and aggressive peer culture and the school's notorious drug subculture best described the school climate in mid-1980s.

A Historical Context

The school was driven by layers of rules and structure, by the end of the 1980s, designed to control the students' behavior, mainly African American males, but did little to address to issues of effective teaching, quality education, career planning, and placement of students in higher level courses within the various departments. As a result, an African American male-oriented peer culture assumed ascendancy, and to a large extent, that culture had an adverse impact on the overall school climate. Among the African American male students of the class of 1989, a drug culture emerged as the single-most detrimental factor which impacted the education of many African American males at Metropolitan High Schooling the school. Table 4 illustrates to rate of suspensions for specific categories considered most anti-social and anti-school.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

There are those in the MHS community who would argue that the oppositional behavior exhibited by the African American males is the central

casual factor which explains their widespread underachievment, but it was also apparent to me given my observations and interviews with the students and teachers that the MHS lacked a serious academic focus even though it was a suburban school with a proven history of academic success. The school is a "zoo," a "drug school," and "joke" were the metaphors most often used by African American males to describe MHS.

It was clear that not more than 1 out of 15 African American males was actually prepared for college-level work. Although the school continued to offer the higher level mathematics and sciences courses provided during the 1970s, few African American male students elected and successfully completed the traditional college preparatory courses, particularly in the areas of mathematics and sciences. Based on a review of all of their individual transcripts, Table 4 provides the numbers and percent of African American males who enrolled in traditional college preparatory mathematic and science courses in Algebra, Geometry, Chemistry and Physics out of 115 students. Corresponding shifts away from the higher level courses, needed for traditional college entry were observed in English, Social Studies, and Foreign Languages department as well.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Consequently, the fifteen college-bound students had a difficult time getting admitted into four-year colleges and universities. Major colleges and universities commonly required all applicants to take either the ACT or SAT college entrance examination and submit their test scores as a prerequisite for admission. Yet, only 17 of the 60 African American males who graduated

from MHS's class of 1989 took the ACT examination[1]. Moreover, no African American male scored within the highest interval and only three scored within the upper-middle interval[2].

Reflecting on Teachers at MHS

No, I don't really feel the teachers were pushing and encouraging us to succeed. I really don't. I had the greatest interest in my computer and English classes. I had Mrs Jackson [African American teacher] a few times. She was great and Mr. Rubenstein was good too. He challenged us in a way; not to the extreme, but he did give us a little challenge. Mrs. Jackson was always on us. She [Mrs. Jackson] pushed me to do better. The majority of the other teachers did next to nothing (Benny, 3rd. year computer science major at the State university).

* * *

They [teachers] gave you an assignment and it had to be done in a certain time; if it wasn't done, you just got marked down. There was no help like tutoring or meet me after school, or after class. It was just this assignment, 'do it the best way you can, and if its not right, we're moving on'. Its not like they took extra time to help you out. They really didn't care (Tommy, attended community college for 2 years).

* * *

Well to me I just wished - well its my fault too - but I wished that the teachers would have cared more. For example, I went through like my senior year carrying like a 3.4., I never brought books home, and everything was just easy. You know, no teachers cared. And then when I got to college I found out that it was a lot different. ... We didn't have too many problems cause

basically, like I said, I didn't have problems with school work. Only thing we had problems with was trying to find things to do during the day. Cause you know, I was real good friends with Mr. Peterson, so I could leave any class any time and go to the gym. We used to play basketball. ... The teachers didn't care. I think my senior year, two of my teachers gave us open book tests, the whole year. Like Ms. Davidson, she gave us open note tests, and then she'll basically - she gave us a review the day before the test. So you know, we just taking all our notes. And in her class, if you finished with all your test, you know you just hand your notes back to one of your friends (Ricky, attended a historically Black college for 2 years and returned to the local community college due to financial problems).

* * *

The only one who really pushed me was Ms. Jackson. She had pushed me a lot to be more motivated and think more positively. She was very helpful. A few of them was terribly easy. But some of them, there was a challenge. Mr. Albertstein was very challenging in the algebra class. I learned a lot in his class (Jay, has enrolled in the community college part-time, he is married and has one child).

* * *

I think that some of the classes were interesting. ... And then you have to have the things that strike a special interest. ... I never liked reading when I was in high school and middle school. But when I started reading on my own, such books dealing with Malcolm X or the history of Egypt, those are factual things. And I think that such things - that if they were required in high school, instead of things like <u>War and Peace</u>, and all these fictional tales that I read for understanding - there are a lot of factual readings that when

you can learn and do the same type of research on as far as creativity and the content. So, ah, I think that was one of the things that wasn't there [interesting and relevant materials] (Marty, has attended a small college for the past 2 yrs. He plans to transfer to a large southern university to complete his undergraduate work).

* * *

Dr. Bloom was challenging, real challenging. It was hard to get to get a "B" in his class. He had us reading every day, but he spent half the course teaching us about the Holocaust and World War II, interesting stuff, but he never taught us about Black things. I don't think that was right, but he was a good teacher. Mrs. Waterman, Mrs. Bonnelli and definitely Mr. Alberstein. To me, they [teachers in general] could have been a little more pushy, if I had something to say about it. I mean, if they were better and pushed us back then, you know, half of the people that didn't graduate, might have graduated (Jimmie attended an historically Black college, had poor grades and returned home to the community college part-time. He plans to attend a second Black college in the fall, 1993).

* * *

I don't know. I guess its the way Mrs. Jackson ran her class, and I guess the control she had over the class. She was one of these that was hard, and didn't necessarily - her class was hard and it was difficult - but in the end, I guess she didn't necessarily grade hard. We did a lot of work, and it was challenging and that was very seldom at Metropolitan High ... I picked up a couple books from some of the White suburban schools. We used the same calculus book and quantitative methods. So the classes - even I would say out in the richest suburban schools - they're still the same. Were using the same

books for the most part. So all it is a matter of sitting down and doing the work. And its just a matter of can you comprehend stuff. Once you get past the teacher relationship, that's the biggest thing to me. So I was just going through the motions at Metropolitan High just like I go through the motions now (Mark achieved the highest GPA among the African American males. He is clearly well on his way to realizing a middle-income life).

* * *

(Carl is currently serving 5 years in a minimum security prison in the state for repeated possession a large quantity of illegal drugs with the intention to market them). He said he took Foods, and he took a lot of foolish courses that really didn't prepare him for anything. And he spent a lot of time just playing around in school because there was no challenge in high school

* * *

I think the classes were offered there, but I don't think the students took them and nobody made them. The challenging courses were offered, but nobody took them. ... I don't think that's service to kids. All that school had was more rules and don't give you anything on the other hand, that doesn't work very well (Billie has worked in an unskilled position on the assembly line with a major factory. He has also attended the local community college part-time for two years).

Mathematics and the Sciences

I went up to geometry. No one ever told me that I needed Algebra 1,2,3; and geometry and trigonometry, calculus, and then all those sciences. I see now with my computer science classes that you have to have a lot of math. I stopped at geometry. So it would have helped if I had gone a little farther,

but I really didn't know that. I have to go much higher than geometry in my major now (Benny, 3rd. year computer science major at the State university).

* * *

If I were back in high school now, I would study electronics. ... Electronics and computers. Cause that's the field everything is moving towards: computers or electronics. I really didn't pay attention to it in high school (Andrew works part-time for a major factory and a clothing store. He attended the community college for one year).

* * *

I'm supposed to be transferring to Georgia Tech after this year to finish my engineering degree. I like cars and I like robots. And that's the one way I can get to the experience I need. I don't want to do any hands-on, manual labor work (Marty works at a factory part-time during the summer. He has completed two years of college).

* * *

I had Ms. Bonnelli's class for math. I like math. I still do like math to this day. I didn't get to trig. I took geometry and then I took algebra. My counselor stuck me in that general math class. I wasn't supposed to be there, but it was too late. I got put into general math because those tests they had gave us during freshman year I had missed. So they just stuck me in general math, and then once I got up in there, the work was too easy. It was 'A's' and everything. I don't know who my counselor was at the time. I took trig when I got into college. (Jimmie attended an historically Black college, had poor grades and returned home to the community college part-time. He plans to attend a second Black college in the fall, 1993).

* * *

Yeah, so I stayed away from science. Looking back when I went to General Motor, they had a lot of stuff in chemical engineers, a lot of programs like that. Even at the pharmaceutical company, I still don't like science. We had to take Physics I & II, but that was basically a math class to me. In Metropolitan High I took stuff were business-related courses. I got out of accounting when I was in Metropolitan High because they had just hired a new teacher out of the state business college (Mark achieved the highest GPA among the African American males. He is clearly well on his way to realizing a middle-income life).

* * *

Rubenstein, that's who I had. He was a good teacher and all. Don't get me wrong, but - well actually, let me back up here. Dr. Rubenstein, I had him for geometry. And, uh, my sister - I used to come home everyday, and my sister would help me with geometry. I got a 'B'. And then, from there on out, I got 'C's'. And then it started going down, because Mr. Black, to me, didn't teach me. I mean, he taught, but he didn't teach. I know that sounds stupid but - He wasn't serious (Dre' is serving two years in the military. He join the service because he could not find work).

* * *

Math, I was always a little weak in, so I never wanted to journey off too far in the math. Get mad at myself, but I think I did well. Science is another one, I don't know why. I liked math more than science. But I never was that good in math. ... I enjoy math. Its a challenge to me (Bill works on the assembly line for a major factory 20 hours per week).

Career Planning

Well I've been interested in mass communications for a long time. It was just that when I graduated from Metropolitan High, I didn't know what I wanted to do. But it was right under my nose. I just didn't know what I wanted to do. I was involved in the television program at Metropolitan High, but I never knew how to get into it as a career.

I selected my courses basically by the requirements that they had and the electives. Whatever was the easiest where I didn't have to go through so much trouble, that's the electives that I picked. Once I went to community college, my algebra for example wasn't good. I took silly courses that I really didn't need like Home Economics, Child Development, and gym. I think I took gym almost every year. Nobody told why don't you take this or that, so I took that because it was easy and fun (Tommy, attended community college for 2 years).

* * *

I moved down south to live with my father for about a year after graduation. Then when I came back, I got a job at this plant. And then I was taking classes at the community college for Business Administration. Really, I just changed my major in the middle of 91. ... I had talked to a friend of mine. He was like telling me about nursing as a good profession for Black men, and I had gotten interested in it. So I had went - I was going to take the classes down at the community college. And I went to talk to a counselor, and she was telling me all the courses and stuff we have to take to become a nurse [at the community]. It was only like a three-year process, but, you know, she said that I would really have to study. But it was like after three years, that would be straight, and we would go right into a job as a nurse (Tee has worked

and attended community college part-time for the past three years. He has not completed a full year of college).

* * *

I can go back to the pharmaceutical company, which is where I was for the past two summers as an intern. I could also go work for them as a sales rep, out in the field. They start out at about thirty-five or forty [thousand per year], and they pay you twice a month, give you a company car. And Marwick, the accounting firm, has been writing me. I talked to a guy from Deloite and Touche. Somebody else contacted me and said Price Waterhouse was interested in me. Numerous grad schools have been sending me stuff. I just got something yesterday from the University of Florida. And the University of Miami has been sending me stuff, and Florida State. And I just took the GMAT about a month ago, but at the time I had four tests more, so I really didn't study. I want to go to grad school, but I want to get paid right now; I want some money right now. So that's what it going to come down to effort as far as doing some really major interviews in the fall and the spring. I'm expecting them to pay for me to go to get my masters, for them to give me the time off. For the things that I want, I guess, even now - people are saying with the economy - I'm wanting a lot. But I want at least $45,000. And I'm wanting to get paid while I'm off; I mean some sort of salary even while I'm in school, because I look at myself as an investment just like a football player or anything like that. Wherever I go, I plan on giving them 110%, as long as they make an investment in me and in my future (Mark achieved the highest GPA among the African American males. He is clearly well on his way to realizing a middle-income life).

* * *

I thought that I would play professional football after high school. Metropolitan High never excited me to play with them. So I just didn't want to play. I never played in high school. ... I wanted to play. They [the team] was constantly loosing, and they would say get on the team, maybe you'll turn it around. How can one man turn the team around (Ron is a machinist full-time)

* * *

I knew that I wanted to go on in school, but I just didn't know what field I would like to go into. No I think my sister helped me decide that because she's five years older than me, and she was in school. And I would think that it would be nice for the two of us to graduate from college. She just did this year, and so that's another reason and goal of mine to continue on. ... I never went to career counseling. ... I don't think they had it when I was there. I think they [the high school] needs it. I took more than the requirements; I graduated with more than my credits. So I would say that I had a variety of courses. I didn't take lots of hard courses, which I think I should have taken; harder English courses. That was the one subject I think I should have taken more - writing (Bill works on an assembly line 20 hours per week).

The Higher Education Pursuit

My parents are helping. The job I have now pays for the eight credits. Anything over that I pay for myself. But before, my parents were basically paying it. I've taken about 12 credits each term. So I end up having to pay for about four [credits] (Benny, 3rd. year computer science major at the State university)?

* * *

I'm going to [a Black southern] University. I went to the community college for two years because when we were in high school, my grades wasn't all that good. I had succumbed to peer pressure. Then my family put me on the right track, and I kept plugging away, and I finally got accepted [at a southern black university]. So Ill be leaving on the 26th [August, 1993]. At the community college, I brought my grade point average to 2.8. At high school, to be honest, it was just a 1.9, so there was no way I could go anywhere. Metropolitan High did nothing to prepare me. ... not at all. If it wasn't for my parents, then I probably wouldn't be going to school either. ... I was confused when I left high school. I didn't know what I was going to do. The education that I had, I felt they had failed me and I really didn't do good. So what I was going to do was go into the armed services. Fortunately my father talked me out of that because he was like that was no place for a black male either. So I just went to the community college and then they gave me confidence and they gave me that push. Another thing is, if I didn't have that parent push, I might stray to other things too. I was lucky, very lucky. I have them to thank.

When I first went to the community college, I had a lackadaisical attitude, in the first semester because I still had this brainwashed mind from Metropolitan High School. In the beginning I thought it was going to be the same as high school. I was already counting my chickens that I was going to probably drop out or something like that. But it was different than Metropolitan. They took the time, they would even call your house or something like that. It was more that they were taking care of me at community college than they were at Metropolitan. All they really had to do

was treat me like a number, but it seemed like they took more time to help you out. I had a Political Science teacher who called my house when I was ill. It made me feel more confident. I need a lot of push, cause I might slip back (Tommy, attended community college for 2 years).

* * *

I didn't do as well as I wanted to do this semester at the university. So I'm taking a year off to work and make some money so I can help pay for school. And Ill be taking classes here, and Ill be going back next year. I'm going to the community college. That's a lot cheaper (Ricky, attended a historically Black college for 2 years and returned to the local community college due to financial problems).

* * *

I was going to school, and I didn't go last year, but I went and registered today. I'm going back. I'm going to the community college and I went to a trade school for offset printing. I'm really just going to take a couple liberal arts classes this time psychology class and English class. college is a lot more work and challenging than I expected. (Jay, has enrolled in the community college part-time, he is married and has one child).

* * *

My college Its [the small black college that he attends] is okay. It has its good qualities as far as what it can do for certain Blacks that haven't achieved very well through high school. But its not a place for somebody that's really smart. You know, if you're really smart, you don't need to be there. It can be too easy and its not challenging, and you get very lazy. And then you go someplace else, and its going to be totally different; and that's what I'm getting setup for. Because I don't know whether I'm ready for

a large White university (Marty, has attended a small college for the past 2 yrs. He plans to transfer to a large southern university to complete his undergraduate work).

* * *

I went to Kentucky State for a year, and then I came back home, and went in to the community college. Then I enrolled in barber college. Now I'm going to transfer to a southern Black university, and get all my stuff. I'll probably leave in January. I'm leaving here in January. I have two years left and I want to finish. I left the university because my mother and them got into a financial crisis at that time. So I had to withdraw. But now everything is okay, and they don't claim me any more, so I got a Pell Grant to go back to school. I was the youngest one on campus, believe or not. At first I was scared, but then I just made the basketball team and everything was ok until my parents ran out of money (Jimmie attended an historically Black college, had poor grades and returned home to the community college part-time. He plans to attend a second Black college in the fall, 1993).

* * *

I got like C's mostly in the courses I took at the community college. Mainly I was taking English. Some of the people I be forgetting they names. But most of them I see that go to school, mainly go to the community college. Its like a big Metropolitan High School (Tee has worked and attended to community part-time for the past three years. He has not completed a full year of college).

* * *

I'm just working. Getting ready to go to school. Trying to go to school in the fall. I'm going to a community college this fall, probably Atlanta Metro; in January I plan to transfer to another school. I'm thinking about going to

Georgia Tech, because I want to be an x-ray technician; or some technological school, you know, where I can become an x-ray technician (Ronnie, recently became a father. His child lives with his mother in Metropolitan City. Ronnie has located to the south. He works as a stockman at a grocery store).

* * *

I went to school out in Utah? It was like the Mormons; they were just on my back real bad. Yeah, [they would come to] my apartment trying to convert me over and all that stuff. Well me and my coach, well we got along, but it was like he got me out there under what I thought was like false pretenses. So I just didn't want to stay out there anymore. When I signed and everything, they told me that I had my own apartment; and that all my books and everything was paid for; and that I would get like a $100 a month cash spending money. Well when I got down there, he [coach] took me to the apartment, and it was like five other people in there with me. I didn't even have my own room. And then as far as paying for school, they didn't pay for - they only paid like $75 on your books. And at the time, I was a legal assistant major and that money was like only enough for maybe a book, maybe two books the most. So I didn't like that. And then as far as the meal money and stuff, that was like in the meal tickets that you could only use at the school. The cafeteria was closed on the weekends and most of the time we be in practice until way past the cafeteria hours. So that really didn't come into play, except for during the day and in between classes. So I was upset about that. And I left. My grades were good, but I couldn't take the Mormons any more so I left.(Marvin, plans to attend a four year state college. He has not fully developed his career goals).

On Being African American, Working-Class, Unskilled and Male

I worked at the gas station ... car wash and now I work at a car dealership. Oh Yeah, I worked at a supermarket too. They were all minimum wage jobs except for this one paying' $5.00 at the car dealership. ... I'm a porter. ... Its okay. But I would like something better, you know. I still want to go to college and succeed at something (Trevor, has one child).

* * *

Well, so far I haven't had any trouble with a job, cause I've been working at the same place since my senior year. I work at the University Computer Center. I'm a computer operator. I started off as a student assistant. ... I do printing. ... I have to put programs into the computer and print out the checks and report cards. ... They [computer center staff] trained me. ... Its a dead-end job and I only make $6.50 an hour and I really can't make it off of that ... sometimes I work only part-time (Benny, 3rd. year computer science major at the State university).

* * *

Girls will mess you up too. I think that's another reason why its so hard because you [African American males] have to try to impress all these girls. Girls now have this materialistic mind, saying they got to have this and that. And if you don't have a good job .... you know I get looked at funny [by young African American women] because I work at a supermarket. If you don't have this or that, you can't hang-out with them [young African American women]. And they don't understand that it takes time for those things. It takes education. Its no fast way to get any money, unless you win the Lotto or deal drugs. ... Yes, I've been working at the Supermarket since I graduated as a bagger, now I'm a cashier. Neither job pays enough to let me survive. If it

wasn't for my parents, then I probably wouldn't be going to school either. I want to go to something bigger and better, even though a lot of my friends don't have jobs. They [his friends] say that I'm lucky because I'm making $6.00 an hour ... . Its okay. But if you want to raise a family or something like that, its no good (Tommy, attended community college for 2 years).

* * *

I work for Metropolitan City Public Works and I also work for the postal service. I have two jobs. ... Well basically I just do repair work and clean up around the city. And for the post office, I sort mail. The job with the City, we barely do anything and its $6.00 an hour. But the post office, you know, I met a lot of new friends, and that's really the job I look forward to going to everyday just to see the people. ... They pay us $6.50. I work 14 hours a day. The post office, like the full-timers they barely have time for themselves cause they always working 8 hours. And basically at night they're working overtime. They have no choice, they have to work. And that's from two to four hours. You know most of the people at the post office, they look older than their age cause all the stress and everything. (Ricky, attended a historically Black college for 2 years and returned to the local community college due to financial problems).

* * *

... Bindery. ... I work at a printing company ... drilling holes in hospital forms, and wrapping up packages. Like folding sheets of paper in half; cutting forms in half and stuff like that. ... I feel like I can do better, and I'm going to progress and work harder to do something else. But for the mean time, I'm going to hang in there and do what I have to do. Its a job, you know, and its helping me pay my bills. ... It pays okay. I think I can

find something better. ... Yes, but its over minimum wage; its $8 and some change. I ran into an incident the last six months to a year, trying to move up. I see that are they not really going to let me move up and progress. If they don't let me move up and progress, I got to move on. ... There was an opening. Every time I inquired about it, they just never gave me a chance to even train for the job. They pulled somebody in off the streets. I don't feel like that's fair to me if I inquired about the job. Whoever they pulled in off the streets, they got to train them too. So why wouldn't the company hire within the company somebody that's there that wants that position. It was a White person. And they made me train the president's brother-in-law, now he's my boss. He makes like double what I make an hour. I don't feel good about that. I don't think that's fair to do that to nobody. But you move on. I'm not going to let that hold me down (Jay, has enrolled in the community college part-time, he is married and has one child).

* * *

I'm self-employed. ... The barber business works good for me. I basically be crowded Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. So I make enough money to keep the ghost's away (Jimmie attended an historically Black college, had poor grades and returned home to the community college part-time. He plans to attend a second Black college in the fall, 1993).

* * *

Being an African American male at 21 ... its alright. It just seems like its a lot pressure on us. I don't know. It seems like its hard to get jobs, and its like more pressure on us to go to school. I have a job. I work downtown. Its like helping put in doors and helping put in ceilings and stuff like that.

And I'm going to school for nursing. I don't want to stay in this position (Tee, has attended the local community college part-time for one year).

* * *

Well right now I'm just working at a grocery store, doing stock. Just making some money to get on the ball. Nothing real special. I'm looking for another job. I may start working two jobs, just to have that more extra money coming in before I start school. So I can get all the things I need taken care of; get on my feet, so then when I get in school, I wont have to be bothered with all that other stuff. I can just focus on studying (Ronnie is a talented artist. He would like to become a syndicated cartoonist. He had hoped to enroll to a Black college in Atlanta where he presently resides).

* * *

I've been interning [during the summers]. I went to New York this spring to work for [a major company] Pharmaceutical company. And I did an internship at General Motors, summers 91 and in spring 92. I was doing accounting at both of them. Each internship paid about $2700 a month [about $17.00 per hour]. Well you need that to live in New York. I moved out to Jersey City after a month. So it wasn't that bad, and that's when I was a sophomore (Mark achieved the highest GPA among the African American males. He is clearly well on his way to realizing a middle-income life).

* * *

I've been just working. Mainly, I was thinking about taking a trade at VocTech, cause I know how to work on a lot of cars. I took that at Metropolitan High School. ... I'm a machine operator for rubber and plastic company. My mother used to work there a long time ago, and I bought a [local] newspaper and the vacancy was in the paper. I went up there and put

an application in, and I just kept calling, kept calling, kept calling, and they finally called me in for an interview, and went up in there. And they make parts for General Motor, sometimes for Seven-up, Coca-Cola, Pepsi. It's just rubber and plastic. And you know working on the table, I'm working in the oven, it's 238^0; and when it gets hot in the summer, the whole place back there is like 120^0 all day. So you [I] be in heat all day. It's good. My mother, she's been there before she had me and my aunt too. So if I can see a future here and going in here and do it, hey, I'm going to do it. I'm satisfied [with the salary]. They pay me good. I couldn't complain. I wouldn't mind more but, hay, can't be greedy, you know. They're paying' me $625 now [48 hrs per week or $13.00 per hour].(Ron believes that his employment options are limited. He has accepted his present working-class position and looks forward to long-term employment not unlike his mother and aunt).

* * *

I guess I would have to say about six months or something like that. That was more recent than anything. And you know, working nights, it was like boring. It wasn't quite working. I was trying to go do that and go to school too. And I got caught up in like working and getting off at like seven in the morning, and having to get back up at like ten to go to class. And that wasn't working. And a couple times I even got caught; it was like on a mid-term [examination day]. At the grocery store, they hold you over - its like you have mandatory overtime. They just wont let you leave. And once I was in there until 10:30 and I had a mid-term at eleven. And I was like, I finally got out and got to class. It was like, wow! They threw that mid-term in my face and I was like practically falling asleep trying to finish it

(Marvin mistakenly attended a Mormon college and was forced to leave as the efforts to persuade him to convert were overwhelming).

CONCLUSION

These deplorable findings at MHS are not surprising. However, given the outcomes at MHS for African American males, a suburban school community, I am forced to question the academic possibilities for African American males in predominantly African American suburbs. The outcomes reported here in the areas of student achievement, drop out rate, expulsions, and lack of caring White teachers are not at all unlike findings reported, nationally, on the education of African American males. For example, Garibaldi (1992) reported that within the New Orleans Public Schools, African American males accounted for 58 % of the non-promotions, 65% of the suspensions, 80% of the expulsions, and 45% of the dropouts while accounting for only 43% of the school population. Leake and Leake (1992) found in Milwaukee (WI) that only 2% (or 135) of 5,700 African American males enrolled in secondary schools of Milwaukee had achieved a cumulative grade point average between 3.0 and 4.0 and 80% of the high school African American males were performing below average. Prince Georges County (MD), a near-central city (Washington,DC) community relates a similar story of extremely poor academic performances for African American males at the secondary school level (Simon & Grady, 1990).

This article described some of the important experiences of the 115 African American males in the class of 1989 at MHS in an African American suburb. I began with a discussion of the demographic transition at MHS, a change from one serving a primarily White, middle-class population to a school serving a predominantly African American, working-class and lower-class

populations. I explored the consequences of this change relative to the quality of educational outcomes for African American males, e.g. as the racial composition of MHS changed from predominantly White and middle-class to predominantly African American and working-class, the quality of the educational outcomes - especially for African American males - declined drastically. Only slightly more than half of the original 115 students actually graduated with their class, and among those who completed their schooling, most were significantly below-average academically and thus less likely to apply to or be accepted into four-year colleges. Nearly one third of the 115 were drop outs or expelled from school. With these outcomes, I had no recourse except to conclude that the school's mission to provide a quality education to all students through effective teaching was not met.

Relationships between teachers and students, which in the 1960s and early 1970s were characterized by "caring informality", were in the late 1980s characterized by "high formality", much social distance, and a lack of close attention to career counseling, test taking preparation and student attendance.

I have argued elsewhere (Polite, 1991) that these outcomes are consistent with reproduction theory with its strong correspondence between the social class make-up of the school and educational outcomes of the students e.g. when the school served middle and upper-middle class students, the majority of the students who attended graduated, attended the better colleges, and eventually assumed middle-class position within society's division of labor. As the social class composition of the school changed, so did the nature of the school environment and academic outcomes experienced by the 115 African American male students I studied. The school became more formal and

oriented to order and discipline, while the academic outcomes of the students were such that most of the students left unprepared for the demands of college and university work and ill-prepared for the post-industrial work world in Midwest. As a result, education -- a major route out of the working and lower-class situation in which these students found themselves -- was closed off to most of the African American male students at MHS.

How can this cycle of miseducation be broken at MHS and other urban fringe school communities? Since the mid-1980s when this work was begun, MHS is now into its sixth year of school reform activities under the direction its principal. Numerous curriculum and social changes have occurred. For example, the school has provided special assistance to all in-coming students and required them to take and pass Algebra and hard sciences. Special counseling attention has been provided to incoming all students, insuring that they are provided sufficient information needed to between their high school careers. Career planning has also become central to the role of the counseling staff. Incidents of violence and crime within the school have diminished significantly and school and community have begun addressing special needs of African American male students. Issues related to cultural and racial differences between the teachers and students are now part of a new on-going discourse within the school.

The school system has undergone significant changes as well. An African American was recently appointed by the Board of Education to serve as Superintendent of Schools. Although he is only into his second year of service, there has been a tremendous amount of excitement and support demonstrated for his school reform efforts. He has demonstrated the ability to bring the total

school community together to work for the improvement of educational outcomes for the predominantly African American student population.

There is still much work to be done within the Metropolitan Public Schools before trenchant and systemic change will effect the education of African American males at MHS. It is recommended that the following factors become part of the systemic change at the school:

1. Provide on-going career planning in-service training for counselors and teachers. There must be a clear focus on setting career goals.
2. Require all students, particularly, African American to develop career objective include career goals, specific strategies and accompanying course requirements need to realize the students' goals. Students should review and adjust their goals and strategies annually under the direction of teachers and counselors.
3. Develop and disseminate semester reports displaying course enrollments by course by grade by gender and race. This information will be instructive for parents, students and counselors.
4. Develop a continuing education program for all teachers designed to provides skills in multicultural and African American learning, communication, social styles.
5. Reinstate courses in African American History and culture.
6. As teaching vacancies occur, hire African American and non-African Americans who are qualified and have an understanding and appreciation for African American culture and history. If such persons are not available in sufficient number, develop a pre-service training program to insure knowledge is acquired by new teachers.

Given the similarities between the outcomes of these students in the case of Metropolitan High School and other African American males across the country, it is hoped that this discussion will lend some insights into the evolution of the undereducation of African American males.

Table 1
State Assessment Results / Fall, 1970

	Metropolitan H.S.	Region	Urban Fringe
Socio-economic Status	over 95th	80-85	75-80
Attitudes and Aspirations			
A. Important of school achievement	90-95	75-80	70-75
B. Self-Perception	over 95th	70-75	60-65
C. Attitude toward school achievement	90-95	35-40	45-50
Vocabulary	well over 95th	50-55	55-60
Reading	over 95th	40-45	50-55
English Expression	over 95th	50-55	50-55
Mathematics	well over 95th	50-55	55-60
Basic Skills Composite	well over 95th	50	55

Note. Scores are reported in percentiles.

Table 2

Academic and Social Outcomes for the Group / N=115

Factors	Incidents	Percentage
Graduated with class - June, 1989	60	52
Graduated during the summer, 1989	3	03
Graduated below average (<2.00 GPA or "C")	39	NA
Graduated above average (>2.75 GPA or better)	08	NA
Graduated with honors (>3.0 GPA or better)	04	NA
Took ACT college entrance exam.	17	NA
Scored 16 pts or better on the ACT*	04	NA
Dropped for non-attendance	28	24
Expelled by the MPS Board of Ed.	08	07
Moved out of the school district	08	07
Received a GED from adult education	04	04
Killed (drug-related)	03	03
Shot by gunfire (drug-related)	03	NA
Incarcerated between Sept., 1989 - June, 1990	23	NA
Unknown	01	01
		100%

Note. A score of 15 or higher on the ACT examination is considered acceptable for some colleges and sports programs.

Table 4

Courses Completed in Traditional Math and Sciences / N=107*

Academic Courses	No. Completed	Percent
Algebra 1	36	34%
Algebra 2	31	29%
Geometry 1	21	20%
Geometry 2	14	13%
Chemistry 1	10	9%
Chemistry 2	07	7%
Physics 1	06	6%
Physics 2	04	4%

Note. The original number of 115 was reduced by 8 to reflect those students who transferred to other schools due to a change in residence.

Table 3
Partial School Suspension Report for African American Male Students Covering a Period Between September, 1989 and June, 1989.

Category	No. Suspended	No. AA Males	No. Non-AA males	% AA males
Weapons	3	3	0	100 %
Striking Teacher	1	1	0	100 %
Fighting	138	92	46	66 %
Drug-Related	21	20	1	95 %
Class Disruption	525	354	171	67 %
Totals	688	470	212	68 %

Note. African Americans comprised 39 % of the total student population.

Table 5

Profiles of the Subjects

Name	School-to-Work Transition	College	S/M	Child
Benny	Has worked at a university computer Center as a printer for three years. He majors in computer science at the same school	SU,3yr		
Andrew	Works part-time at a factory and for at clothing store as a clerk for 6 mos.	MCC,1yr		
Trevor	Has worked at several minimum wage jobs,i.e gas station, local car wash, and bagger at grocery store.			
Tommy	Has worked at grocery as a bagger and cashier.	MCC,2yr GU,1yr		
Ricky	Has worked as a part-time postal worker during the summer.	HU,2yr drop		
Jay	Works as a binder, binding hosp. forms for $7.50 per hr.	MCC,0yr	y	1
Marty	Works at factory part-time assisting on the assembly line at $9.00 per hrs.	LU,2yr		
Jimmie	Self-employed as a barber. Earns less than minimum wages. Works at home.	KSU,2yr MCC,1yr		
Tee	Part-time worker at office bldg. inner-city as a handy man.	MCC,1		
Ronnie	Stockman at grocery store in Atlanta, GA.		n	1
Kenny	Works as a paraprof. at local elem school. Also deals drugs.		y	2
Mark	Worked for Pharmac. co, in NY city as an intern from college at $2,700 per month.	FAM, 3yr		
Ron	Machine worker at rubber factory, melting plastics for parts at minimum wage.			
Dre'	Serving two yrs in the military. Entered because he could not find work.			
Bill	Works on the assembly line for a major factory. Flex., part-time (20 hrs. per).	MCC,2yr		
Fred	Unemployed. Was shot at a party in the leg.		y	
Marvin	Part-time night worker as a stockman at grocery.	U,2yr		

Carl	Unemployed. Entered the army and left early. Claimed the service was too much for him. Got an honorable discharge.			
JoJo	Entered the army and became a translator (Span/Eng).		y	
Bobby	Makes Compact Discs. He is studying criminal justice at the community college	MCC, 1yr		
Mike	Incarcerated/drug-related	n	n	
Les	Dealing drugs			
Dwayne	Was shot in the chest at a party. Unemployed.	n	n	
Will	Jail/drug-related	n	n	
Malik	Jail/ drug-related	n	n	
Jim	Jail/drug-related	n	n	
James	Unemployed	y	n	
Rico	Baker at local bakery	n	n	
Davie	Has cancer and is unemployed	n	n	
Malik	Jail/ Breaking and entering	n	n	
JoJo	Jail drug-related	n	n	
Paco	Works at a shoe store. He earns a minimum wages. Has problems passing exams.	n	n	
Jermain	Works at gas station.			
Nick	Army	n	n	
Selwin	Works at a bagel store. Did not graduate.	n	n	

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ENDNOTES

1. Most college-bound students throughout the Mid-Western states traditionally took the ACT examination while the SAT is generally taken by those students residing in the Northeastern section of the country (Farrant, 1990).

2. The American College Testing Program, as reported by Farrant (1990), aggregate the ACT composite scores in four intervals:

26 - 36	highest interval
21 - 25	upper-middle interval
16 - 20	lower-middle interval
1 - 15	lowest interval